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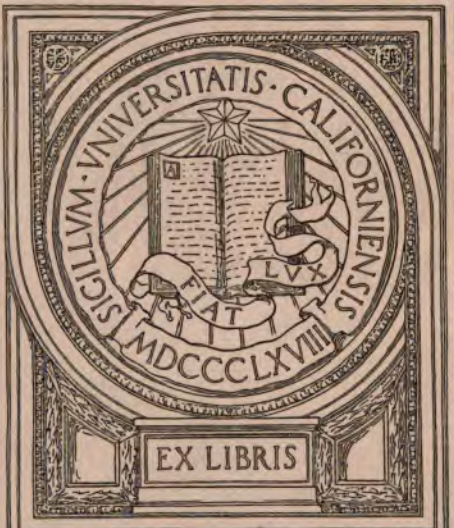

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THE WINGS.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

CERDIC.
ÆLFRIC the King.
BRUN.
EDBURGA.

TIME:—*Northumbria before 700* A.D.

THE WINGS

BY JOSEPHINE PRESTON PEABODY

TOY THEATRE

Jan. 15, 1912

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

CERDIC. . . . . *Mr. Churchill*
ÆLFRIC the King. . . . . *Mr. Rawson*
BRUN. . . . . *Master Pellegrini*
EDBURGA. . . . . *Mrs. Briggs*

NORTHUMBRIA BEFORE 700 A.D.

SCENE DESIGNED BY MR. LIVINGSTON PLATT.

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

THE WINGS

(*The* SCENE *passes within a low hut, Saxon-built. At back, a small window-space, and, centre a doorway, past which the seabirds fly in a gray light.—Against the right wall, a seat and a shelf with one or two great books, a half-loaf of bread, and a lamp without a light. Near by, a large unlighted lantern.—On the left wall, a rude wooden cross; below it, a bench with a slab of stone upon it, covered over; mallet, chisel and other tools. Also to the left, a low door, now shut, leading to an inner cell.—Twilight of a bleak day*)

(*Enter* BRUN *the fisher-boy, doubtfully. He looks from bench to books, and shakes his head. There appears on the threshold behind him the figure of a woman,* EDBURGA, *in a long cloak.* BRUN, *when he turns, waves her back with a gesture of warning entreaty.*)

BRUN.

No more, but wings and wings! And still no light.
He is not here, for all the night be wild.
The wind cries out;—there will be broken wings,
And they do vex him, ever. Nay, forbear!

(EDBURGA *stands in the doorway.*)

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Gudewife, forbear! Ye may not step within.
He is not here, although the door stood wide;
See you, the holy Cerdic is not here.

EDBURGA.

Where, then?

BRUN.

God wot! 'Twill be a mickle hap
That holds him fast; and no light litten yet.
The light is wanting.—Do not come within;
Bide yonder.

EDBURGA.

Wherefore? Wit ye who am I?

(*He shakes his head. She draws aside veil and wimple, discovering a young face and long braids of red-gold hair; then she steps in arrogantly, to his dumb distress. While he replies in abashed singsong to her questions, she looks about her with something between scorn and curiosity.*)

Deem ye the holy Cerdic hides away?
Or that I come for naught? —What art thou called?

BRUN.

Brun, son of Wulfstan. . . .

EDBURGA.

And what dost thou here?

BRUN.

Ye bade me lead you hither from the shore,
See you;—therefore I came. Often I come,
Likewise to bring the holy Cerdic bread,
And tidings from the Abbey. . . . Ye can hear
Our bell, save when the wind will be too high,
At vesper-time and curfew.—He would fast,
Ye wit, till he were like the lanthorn yonder,
As ye could see a light through, if let be!
Then I row hither, or across the bar

I come here at low water, and bring bread.—
And if I did not, sure the Angel would.

EDBURGA.

Sooth!

BRUN.

All folk say. Once I lay by to watch,
Till nigh I heard it coming. For I dread
Some day the Angel seize me by the hair!—
Lady, ye wit no woman can be here,
In holy Cerdic's cell.

EDBURGA.

Was this thy dread?——
And dare no townsfolk come?

BRUN.

Save they be sick
And sore possest, no higher than the door!
But ye have come within. Pray now, go forth!

EDBURGA (*stealthily*).

And I, worn weary, I must forth again
Into the wet, for that I am a Woman?

BRUN.

Needs must ye take it ill to be a woman.
But see, there is a tree to shelter by,
A dark tree yonder, hard upon the dune.—
Forsooth, all womankind he should mislike;
And beyond that, men say it was a woman
Drove Cerdic from the King.

EDBURGA.

Men say? . . . What men?

BRUN.

Sooth, did ye never hear?

EDBURGA.

What do men say?

BRUN.

It was for chiding the King's light-o'-love,—
I wot not who, no more than ye;—

EDBURGA.

Her name
Is called Edburga.

BRUN.

Ay, an evil woman!
She was it, brought mislike upon the King,
And Cerdic bade him leave her.—And the King
Would not; but still she wasteth all his days,
And, for her sake, he hath no mind to wed.
And he was wroth; and, likewise for her sake,
He drove the holy Cerdic from the town.—
But Cerdic found our island. And they tell,
His faring here must bring a blessing down.—

EDBURGA.

Ay, hath it fallen yet? Methought the isle
Looked bare enough, and starven!

BRUN.

Nay, not yet.
But likewise there are curses in the court;
And men cry out on Ælfric.—Wit ye well,
Their longing is for Cerdic home again.

EDBURGA.

And Cerdic, will he hence? When the King comes,
With shining gifts! (*Between her teeth.*)

BRUN.

If he put *her* away,
It may be . . . See you, Cerdic is so holy,
They tell he will not look upon a woman
When he must speak with them. But I'm a man:
I talk with him, and look. And so I too
Would not have spoke with ye, but that ye came
To ask the way——

EDBURGA.

Unto that holy man. . . .
Yea, truly! I would see and speak with Cerdic.
Ye deem he cometh hither soon?

BRUN.

God wot!

He hath a Book here that he reads upon;
Likewise he knoweth how to grave on stone,
With pictures like to frost. But oftentimes
All day he standeth on the rocks, adream,
So stark the sea-birds have no fear of him,
But graze his face in flying. So, belike,
It is a Vision that doth keep him now;
For still the light is ever lit, by now.
He will be coming. . . . Ye must bide beyond.

EDBURGA.

Go thou. And I will follow to thy tree,
There to sit down . . . and pray . . . till I behold
Thy holy Cerdic coming.—Have no fear!
See: I will wrap my mantle round my hair,
As holy men would have us do.—Such peril,—
And dear enchantment, in a woman's hair!
So: 'tis my will to stand thus in the wind,
Now, while the sun sets, and until the Fiend
That rends me, have his own; or Cerdic——

BRUN.

Woe!——
The Fiend!—

EDBURGA.

That dwells in Woman: thou hast said.

BRUN.

Woe that I brought ye here to Cerdic's cell!

EDBURGA (*undoing a scarf from her neck*).

Nay, thou wilt never rue it.—Take this scarf
So, knotted thrice,—unto the farthest rock,
Where thou shalt bind it to that only bush,—
The thorn thou shewedst me; and so let hang
That the sea-winds may sift and winnow it.
This if thou do—and look not back again,—
And say thy prayer, likewise, for holy Cerdic!—
There shall no hurt come nigh thee from the Fiend.—
But I must bide by yonder starven pine,

Till Cerdic pass, . . . to shrive me.

BRUN (*terrified*).

Ay, go hence!
There doth he bless the sick.

EDBURGA.

I follow thee.
And may the saints forgive it to this—*saint,*
There stepped upon his threshold one poor woman,
Seeing he knew not!—I will after thee.

BRUN.

Nay, do not! Sooth, I will as ye have said.——

EDBURGA.

Never look back!

BRUN (*terrified*).

By holy Guthlac, never!——
When ye are shriven . . . take the self-same way
Back to the shore. . . .

(*Running out.*)

God shield the holy Cerdic!

EDBURGA (*alone, stretching out her arms with savage relief.*)

God crush the holy Cerdic, with His shield!

(*She looks about her, between curiosity and aversion; then begins to sing with exuberant defiance of the place.*)

If the moon were mine
For a silver cup.
Ah, but I would fill it up
With red wine, red wine!
Then, O love of mine. . . .

(*She stops singing as she comes to the bench with the covered stone, and draws near to look, as*

if it fascinated and repelled her; then she turns away, silent. From the doorway, she seems to listen; then calls through her hands in a soft, high voice, like the wind.)

Ælfric . . . the King! (*Exit* EDBURGA)

(*The door blows shut after her. Deep twilight falls. There is a pause, filled with the crying of wind and of seagulls. Then the low door in the left wall opens, and* CERDIC *gropes his way in, carrying a taper. He is a young monk with the keen face of a mystic, worn white with fatigue. He seems half tranced.*)

CERDIC.

The darkness here. . . . Need be, I fell asleep.
Sleep, sleep for me, and in the daytime!—Ah,
The little sleep! Could I not watch one hour?
Yea, Lord, for all the hours of day and night;
Save that in sleep, the wings stoop near to me
I grasp for vainly, waking. . . . Was it sleep?
Or were they here, the voices and the wings?—
Not yours, belovèd birds! Not yours that beat
Gray through the wind and wet, in search of me.—
Lady of Heaven! Forgive me that I slept,
Forgetful of thy birds, to call them in
And break my bread with them.—

(*He goes to the shelf, and taking the loaf down, breaks and scatters it from the doorway, afterwards closing the door.*)

Take all,—take all!
For I have slept; and I am filled indeed,
With manna and with light.
Yet, O thou Blessèd!

If my poor prayer and longing may avail,
Like hands of need, dragging thy garment's hem,
Vouchsafe to me, here in my wilderness,
One sign to ease the hunger of my heart,
That calls and echoes, prays and hears the prayer,
Echoed and ebbing, till it surge again;
High tide,—low tide,—but never any word.
High tide,—low tide; never a *face* to see!

(*He comes down to the bench. From his taper he lights the lanthorn, and sets it by; then reverently he lifts the covering-cloth from the stone, to look upon his work.*)

Our Lady of all Comfort. Rose of Heaven!
Could I but make her, here, as in my dream,
That blessèd Face,—the stone should put forth might
Unto blind eyes, and they would look, and see!
Ah, when?—Poor scribbled track, sore pitiful,
Of wingless longing! Here the Face should be;
With this gray blankness where the eyes would shine,
More lovely blue than ever twilight sea.
And here would be her hair;—a golden wave
Of sunset, ebbing redly in the west . . .
Her hair. . . . But never can I make her hands,
Like to those palest roses that did grow
Close to the Abbey wall. . . . Ah, could I know,
Even in a dream! Since unto lowlier men
Than blessèd Luke, she hath vouchsafed to see
Her very face.—Comfort this halting tool,—
Quicken this stone! Let not the earth go dark
Of such a likeness for men's hearts to keep,
Beautiful, on the altar of that temple

Whose walls be blazoned with the shapes of earth,—
Scribbled and scarred with basest names and things,
Foul upon clear!—Even as my Dream did fade
When some voice in my soul, more ware than I,
Thrust me awake, crying, "Ælfric—the King!"
And I awoke, and heard no more.—

(*Lifting his face with shut eyes.*)

Let be!
There shall no hurt come near my dream of thee;
But I will count a thousand dawning suns,
Patient, so be that on some dawn of day,
Thou lean from out of heaven, and I may see
Thy face like dawn above thy Star-in-the-East,
Mother of all the motherless,—God's Mother!
And still, though I should count the thousand years,
Still shall my heart be ready.

(*The wind shakes the door; and the gulls go by.*)

—Ah, the wings!
Ever thy birds, the while I hark for thee.
Never thy word, but only call of birds,
And waves and wind, and evermore the wings
Of sea-gulls that I hear with quickened heart
Of hope: because they knock upon my door,
Knocking and mocking, ever! Be it so.—
Lady of Heaven, beside thy flock of stars,
Who broodest over this mid-world as though
It were an ailing lamb, I wait for thee.
I harken, and my heart is at the gate . . .
My soul doth wait, as a poor vacant chamber,
With the door wide like famine, but for thee;

Ay, and the torches waiting for a fire
White from the stars,—not breathing, save for thee.
O Moon of Pity, if this loneliness,
And the sore heart of man that knows but how
To seek a home, can ever draw thee down,
Lean from thy glory with thy mother-looks;—
Lean down to bless,—follow thy pity, down,—
Down to this solitude.——Let me once look
On Thee!

(*A knocking on the door.* CERDIC *looks up with fixed eyes. The door swings open, and* EDBURGA *stands on the threshold, her veil shadowing her face, the two long golden braids hanging below, upon her breast.—She steps in, and stands regarding him for a moment; then speaks in a voice without emotion of any kind.*)

EDBURGA.
Knowest thou me?

(CERDIC, *as in a trance, crosses his arms on his breast. His face grows radiant with beatitude. Without giving sign of her bewilderment,* EDBURGA *comes forward slowly, facing him. Then she loosens the veil from her head and the cloak from her shoulders. They fall about her feet; she stands richly arrayed.* CERDIC *sinks upon his knees.*)

Behold me. . . . Thou art Cerdic.
CERDIC (*in a far-off voice*).
Lady, thou knowest.
EDBURGA.
Yea, thou hast well said.
I know thee what thou art. Thou dost not know
What I am.—Dost thou dream?

CERDIC.

It well may be . . .
I dream.

EDBURGA.

Wake then. For thou shouldst know me, Cerdic.

(*He does not move. She regards him with a closer curiosity.*)

Make me some firelight here. For I am cold.

CERDIC.

Lady, have pity that my heart is shamed
And my poor home is witless of the fire,
What warmth may be. I had no thought—of this.

EDBURGA.

Wake, Cerdic. 'Tis no dream. Albeit thine eyes
Never looked yet on mine. Guess, who am I?
Thy lips have used my name. Why art thou dumb
But now?

(*He answers in a joyful prayer.*)

CERDIC.

Thy grace must needs unseal this mouth.
Thou knowest.—Give me leave to tell of thee,
In words like golden harp-strings; but to tell
How all the air is summer with thy coming,
And morn doth flush the furrows of the sea!
Yea, how thy voice hath fallen, like white manna,
To fill the craving hunger of the soul
That longed for God and thee.

(*She recoils with sudden contemptuous laughter.*)

EDBURGA.

——Nay, for us twain!

This, then, is Holy Cerdic, who would look
Upon no woman! . . . Thou, who wouldst have us
Forswear all earth, for heaven somewhere outside,
Tell me, O wise one, of this precious rede:—
How to keep both, shut fast in godly hands!

(CERDIC, *stricken aghast, reaches towards the fallen mantle and touches it in horror, to make sure. As his vision breaks, he rises and stands back, striving to master his anguish.*)

Dreaming, good sooth! You touch it, to make sure,
Dreamer of far-off women? But this dream
Is a true dream; as I am very Woman.
Nor shalt thou bid me go till I have said.
So mild thou wert, before I made me known!

CERDIC (*gravely*).
Known, maiden?

(*She regards him keenly; then goes to the door, shuts it, and turns towards him, with triumph growing in her looks.*)

EDBURGA.
Nay, then!—I will tell thee more.
How shouldst thou know me? I am the first woman,
Haply, thine eyes have met; and so, like Eve,
Older and wiser than thou!—I come to tell,
First, of the few, far things thou dost not know;
Then, of thyself, thou knowest less than all; . . .
Then . . . what a pitiful King's Counsellor
Thou wert,—too craven to behold a woman!

CERDIC.

No longer give I counsel, well or ill,
Unto the King. Another counsellor
He hath preferred before me; for whose sake
I am an exile, and this place my home.

EDBURGA.

Haply it was Edburga?

CERDIC.

Even she,—
The King's Edburga.—If I have been craven,
Speak out thy hurt. For I will hear, and learn.

(*He lights the lamp also, from the lanthorn; then stands with his arms folded, looking at her calmly. She begins with a cold irony that grows passionate.*)

EDBURGA.

Ay, learn.—If that Edburga drave thee here,
Bethink thee, that Edburga was a woman.
Learn that there was some strength around her then,
Stronger than thou, to drive thee from his heart—
Ælfric the King's—and from the city gate!—
The woman's strength, the one might that is Woman.
And though ye give and take us as your own,
What is it that ye flee from and ye fear?——
Dreading this . . . Softness, once it be unchained!
Con thy blank heart. For I will write in it
The runes that might unriddle thee the world;
And thou shalt ponder them, one little hour,
Looking upon me.—Nay, I do not come,
Save but in hatred. Thou art safe from all
Thy heart can fear, and long for—and despise!
I hate thee; and I tell thee; and I come

To speak thee sooth, and at my going hence
To leave full goodly token that I hate.—
But thou, look back and be the wiser,—thou!
When I did enter, ere we came to speech,
What was it bowed thy knees before me here
Against thy will? Thou'rt dumb. Why then, poor clod,
What, but this weird which thou couldst never face?—
This little power-and-glory-all-for-naught!
What save one Woman? And that one, to thee,
The basest woman-weed in all the world!—
Edburga!

CERDIC.

Ah, my God! No, no.——

EDBURGA.

The King's—
The King's Edburga!

CERDIC (*apart*).

Ah, forgive—forgive . . .

EDBURGA.

Prayest me now forgiveness?

CERDIC (*sternly*).

Nay, not thee!
Not thee.

EDBURGA.

Then haply heaven: that thou wert moved
By this poor beauty that I wear upon me?—
Waste not thy prayer. The peril that I bring
Is nothing strange; 'tis old and grim and free.
Have I not said, I come to tell thee of it?—
And what I am that reckon with thee?

CERDIC.

Speak.

EDBURGA.

I am Edburga, and the daughter of Ulf.
My mother was a slave. For she was sold,

And given in her youth unto Svanfleda,
Sister of Ulf,—a just and holy woman;
Who bought and set her free, for Ulf to wed,—
And had it written in the gospel-book,—
When that his heart clave to her.—That, O monk,
Thou canst but hear, not heed! And I was grown,
When Ulf came to be made an ealdorman.
And Bertric would have taken me to wife,
Save that I came before the eyes of Ælfric
The King; and so . . .
—What are you, men and monks,
That you may give us unto such an one
To bind your lands together? Or to bring
The sum of twenty spears or more, to follow
You, at the man-hunt?—Women bring you forth,
As Darkness cherishes the doomful light
Of the Sun, that being grown, shakes his bright locks
And puts all to the sword!—I'll not be given
To Bertric, would that Bertric have me now:—
I, a free-woman, and the gladlier free,
That being yet unborn, I was a slave!
I am a creature rooted in the dark,
But born to sunlight and the noble air.
I will to give; and I will not be given.
I fear not right nor left, nor east, nor west;
Nor thee!—For that I have is all mine own
To give or keep. And I am all I have.
And I am Ælfric's,—for a kingly gift.

(*A bugle sounds distantly. Neither hears as they face each other fiercely.*)

I reck no more. But thou, thou shadow-thing,
Unwitting what or men or shadows be,
And 'hearing of my name and how time sped',

And fearing for the council and the peace,
Thou wouldst have hurled my one gift of myself
Into the dust; and called all men to see,
And curse and stone me hence: and if thou couldst!—
As there were no degrees 'twixt mire and me.
O thou wise Cerdic, hear the end of this.
For thy 'King's Peace,' thou hast so ploughed the state,
And turned the people's heart against their King,
That now they clamor for their holy man!
Like rain and snow, two names make dim the air
With 'Cerdic' and 'Edburga'!

CERDIC.

I knew not this.

EDBURGA.

Quoth he! Thou hast it, now. Yet even so,
Truly, thou wilt not come again, to rule! . . .
Thou piece of craft, I know thee. Dost thou think
Cerdic shall win? Or, haply, base Edburga?
. . . . . .
The King is here, without . . . and nigh at hand,
Coming with torches.

(*Lifts her hand to listen.*)

. . . Ay!

CERDIC (*dazed*).

The King is come. . . .

EDBURGA.

Yea, so.—Tho' thou be traitor, he's a King;
And thou hast been a one-time counsellor.
He comes to say farewell . . . And I am first,
To shew thee something of this world, before

Thou tak'st thy leave for that far other world
Thou knowst so well;—and liker home for thee,
Than this warm Earth so full of seas and sun,—
Too golden—like my hair! . . .
The tide is in.
It was low water when I walked across;
But I did seal my name upon the shore!

CERDIC.

Ælfric is come . . .

EDBURGA.

I have said.—And Ælfric's men.

CEDRIC.

Thou speakst not truly. Ælfric is a king,
Though he be young.

EDBURGA.

But,—Cerdic or Edburga!

CERDIC.

Not thus for Ælfric! He bore love to me.

EDBURGA.

Ay, long ago. . . . For any of the earls
He would not so have done.—It was for me.
Save thyself, Holy Cerdic!—

(*She points to the door with ironic invitation.* CERDIC *turns towards the bench, and grasping his mallet, looks on the carven stone, lifting the cloth from it. She sees with amusement.*)

Let us see
How monks may fight! . . .

(*He covers the stone and faces her with sudden indignation, still grasping his mallet.*)

Stout tools they look: and thou hast need of them.
If thou wilt cling to such a meagre life,

Who scants a moment? Surely not the King!
Yet dost thou look not now, as when I came,
Kneeling adaze before me! And belike
I seemed not thus to thee.—What I did seem,
I wonder yet, O blind man with new eyes!—
I wonder yet.——

(*The Abbey bell sounds faintly far off. It is followed by confused sounds of approach.*)

CERDIC.

Hear, then! Thou sayst truth:—
How much of truth I may have time to tell thee,
Thou bitter truth, Edburga!—When I kneeled,
Not knowing,—for my heart was worn with dreams,
Mine eyes were worn with watching,—I had prayed
Only to hear one knock upon the door;
Only to see one Vision, that I strove
To carve there on the stone. . . . There came a knock,
There stood one . . . at the door.—And I looked up,
And saw in thee what I had prayed to see;—
And knew not what I saw, believing thee—
God rede to me this day in Paradise
The meaning of that mock!—believing thee
The Vision . . . of all pity and all grace,
The Blessèd One, the Mother of Our Lord!—

EDBURGA.

Out! Mock me not.—Be still—

CERDIC (*with anguish*).

The Blessèd One!—
Believing thee . . . the Mother of Our Lord! . . .

(EDBURGA *gives a strange cry and falls huddled against the door, with her veil gathered over*

her face, as CERDIC *breaks the stone into fragments.—There is a bugle-blast without, and the sound of voices and steel; then a blow upon the door.* CERDIC *hurls away the mallet.*)

Could spears bite out this broken heart of a fool,
And tear it from me!—
Bid them in.

VOICE (*without*).
Come forth!

(*Enter* ÆLFRIC *alone. The open door shows the torches outside.* CERDIC *faces him, sternly motionless.* EDBURGA *is crouched by the doorway, her face covered. The King looks from one to other in amazement.*)

ÆLFRIC.
Where was thy signal? Twice I sounded horn.—

(*To* CERDIC.)

I bade thee forth. Why cam'st thou not?
Is Cerdic
Afraid to die?—
. . . What makes Edburga here?
Thou wert to give me signal. . . . What befell?
Thou cowering in thy veil? When have I seen
This thing?—Speak!—

EDBURGA (*faintly*).
Ælfric . . .

ÆLFRIC.
Up! Rise up and speak.
Come forth, out of thy veil!

EDBURGA.
I cannot . . .

ÆLFRIC.
Come.—
. . . Look up.—
EDBURGA.
Let be. . . . Ah, ah! . . .
ÆLFRIC (*fiercely*).
Out . . . from thy veil!

(*Still she shrinks, covered. He turns on* CERDIC, *drawing his sword with a cry.*)

Thou diest!—

(EDBURGA *flings herself against him and clasps his knees, reaching up towards his arm.*)

EDBURGA.
No, Ælfric, no. But give me time!—Not yet.
Let be . . . I do not know . . . I do not know . . .
I cannot tell thee why . . .
ÆLFRIC.
Thou wilt not speak?
EDBURGA.
Yea, soon. . . . Be patient, . . . hear!

(*In a gasping whisper.*)

. . . Put up thy sword.
ÆLFRIC.
Thou plead for him? Am I become thy fool?
For he it was so called me, on a time!—
Speak.—Hath one hour stricken thy mind from thee?
Art thou Edburga? And am I the King?
What was the spell?—For whom was ambush set?
Gods!—I would make all sure, but I am loath
To shame the King I was, before my thanes.

(*He pushes the door shut and stands against it, holding his sword drawn.*)

Answer, Edburga.—Was't for me or thee,
I took this errand on me? Thou hast said
One of you twain must live, the other die.—
To death with him.

EDBURGA.

It shall dishonor thee.

ÆLFRIC.

Bid in the hands to do it.—For that cause
Thou wouldst have had them hither. Let them be
Dishonored! So:—was it not all thy deed?

EDBURGA.

Mine, mine,—not thine! But thou, undo my deed,
And cast it from thee.—He hath spoken true . . .
Not all, not all!—But yet, 'tis I have clasped
This mantle of dishonor round thy neck,
That is so foul upon thee.—I saw not;—
But now I do behold . . . and all is strange.
Yea, I hate Cerdic . . . and I hate myself . . .
I bade thee do it, and I pray thee now,
Hear me again, and do it not!

ÆLFRIC (*as she clings to him again*).

Edburga!

EDBURGA.

All I have asked of thee,—unto this hour,
Put it away from thee and me, . . . away!

ÆLFRIC.

Edburga!

(*She stands up, with a cry.*)

EDBURGA.

Doubt me not. Thou dost believe!

I loved thee, and I love thee, and . . . I love thee.—
I loved thee that thou wert the kingliest man;
And I have made thee lesser.—Be not . . . less.
The people love thee yet.—Ah, but they shall!
I did not know . . . but now . . .
(*Wistfully*) Thou wilt believe?—
Undo me from thy neck.—Cast me away.—
I love thee, and I know thou didst love me.—
Cast me away!—

(CERDIC *stretches his arms out to them, suddenly illumined with great joy.*)

CERDIC.
O, woman!—child. . . . God's child.

(*They turn to him, perplexed,* EDBURGA *sobbing at the feet of* ÆLFRIC.)

Wilt thou forgive?
EDBURGA (*doubting*).
Forgive thee, Cerdic? . . . Ah! . . .
CERDIC.
Then hear me; and forgive when I have done.
I took thee for a bitter mockery
Of my fair dream. Thou wert to me one sent
To bow my pride, who deemed my prayer could win
The blessèd Vision . . .
So I let break the image that I strove
To make of her; for that it was dishonored.
I brake it . . . and my heart was sore abased.—
Blest be that shame and sharpness!—This thy word
Makes me to know the answer to the prayer,

Now that I see, through all these sevenfold
veils . . .
The Likeness! . . .

EDBURGA.

Nay, . . . to Her?

CERDIC.

Even to her;
Yea, and to Him who did so love the world:—
Love, the one Likeness. . . .

ÆLFRIC (*after a silence*).

Cerdic, thou shamest me.

(*He puts up his sword.* EDBURGA *hides her face against his knees.*)

CERDIC.

Lift up her head, and set her by thy side. . . .
Wed her. Whom thou hast humbled, lift her
up.—
The gift that thou hast taken, hold it high.

ÆLFRIC.

Come with us, Cerdic.—Be at our right hand.

CERDIC.

Not yet. For I have lived within a dream
Too long. . . . Not yet know I enough of
God,—
Or men.

(*As they turn to go,* EDBURGA *leaves the King's arms irresolutely. She draws near the bench and gathers up the fragments of the broken stone to lay them together with a half-fearful touch, not looking at* CERDIC. *Exeunt* EDBURGA *and the King.*—CERDIC *follows them to the threshold, looking out, his hands held after them in farewell. There is a sharp command. The torches go, and the footsteps on the pebbles. A gust of wind blows suddenly; and*

CERDIC *re-enters with a hurt sea-gull. There is the faint sound of the Abbey bell once.* CERDIC *comes slowly down towards the bench and the stone fragments, his face set, and the sea-gull held close to his breast.*

Ah, Thou!—Have pity on all broken wings.

CURTAIN.

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